

Waukegan, IL - With cold weather and high heating costs approaching, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk brought federal, state and local officials together to provide the most up-to-date information on how families can receive home heating assistance. In addition, the congressman outlined several steps Congress is taking to lower fuel costs and was joined by local energy company representatives who shared ways to reduce home heating costs.

Congressman Kirk was joined for today's working session by Doug O'Brien, Midwest Region V Director for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Jerry Todd from People's Energy, Jim Tansor, the Community Relations Director for Nicor Gas, Dianne Emerson from ComEd, and Mary Lockhart White, Executive Director for the Community Action Partnership of Lake County.

Hurricanes Katrina, Rita triggered supply shortages in the Midwest. Faced with rising fuel costs, Congress doubled the authorization for funding the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) from two billion to five billion dollars. Supported by the federal HHS and the state of Illinois, LIHEAP helps eligible low-income families keep their homes warm.

"Higher home heating bills will hurt low-income seniors and families already struggling on a tight budget," said Kirk. "As Congress increases funding for the Low-Income Energy Program, it is my job to make sure that Northern Illinois families get the home heating help they need."

In Illinois, selected seniors, disabled residents and low-income families with children were able to apply for LIHEAP assistance starting September 1st. All other low-income residents whose monthly income is below \$1,604 for couples or \$1,196 for individuals can apply for LIHEAP aid beginning next Tuesday, November 1. Lake County families can apply for aid at the Community Action Partnership ((847) 249-4330 http://www.house.gov/htbin/leave_site?ln_url=http://www.apolc.org) and Cook County families can apply at the Community and Economic Development Association of Cook County ((312) 795-8800).

In addition to federal assistance, Kirk highlighted efforts by ComEd, People's Energy and Nicor Gas to reduce the burden on residents struggling to pay their energy bills. All three companies agreed to waive reconnection fees and suspend deposit requirements for customers receiving LIHEAP benefits this winter.

Nicor Gas and Peoples Energy are also contributing to the “Good Samaritan Initiative”, a policy adopted by Illinois gas companies allowing low-income customers to get their heat reconnected by paying just 20 percent of their past-due amount, or \$250, whichever is less. To qualify for this program, a utility customer must have an annual income that does not exceed 150 percent of the federal poverty line. ComEd does not participate in the Good Samaritan fund, but will restore service to customers if they pay 20 percent of their entire balance.

With all Illinois families expected to experience a large increase in their home heating costs, Congressman Kirk also asked gas company representatives to share easy ways homes can be winterized to reduce fuel consumption and save money. Congressman Kirk’s office prepared a list of [10 key tips](#) and [contact numbers](#) for families needing more information.

“I am very pleased that HHS, Nicor Gas, People’s Energy and ComEd joined me to outline their policies to help low-income families and senior citizens with rising fuel costs this winter,” said Congressman Kirk. “We need a public-private partnership to protect our fellow citizens who are most at risk during the cold weather months.”

Kirk also outlined steps needed to be taken now to reduce natural gas prices in the winters to come. “Leaders in Congress focused the President’s attention on delays in finishing the Trans-Canada natural gas pipeline,” said Kirk. Strongly supported by environmental and energy leaders, the pipeline has been needlessly held up by American regulations. “This project offers the greatest promise of lowering natural gas prices in the Midwest for years to come.”

To provide further assistance, the Community Action Partnership of Lake County will hold an Energy Fair on November 19th where LIHEAP representatives and several Illinois energy companies will be on-hand to speak with residents about their financial aid programs and help them apply for benefits. When applying for assistance, bring the following with you:

- Proof of gross income from all household members for the 30-day period prior to application date;
- A copy of your current heat and electric bills (if you pay for your home energy directly);
- Proof of Social Security numbers of all household members;
- If a member of your household receives Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), you must bring their "Medical Eligibility Card;" and
- If you rent, bring proof of your rental agreement which states your monthly rent amount.

Financial Assistance Energy Programs for Northern Illinois Residents

LIHEAP

1-800-252-8643

217-785-6135

Websites:

http://www.house.gov/htbin/leave_site?ln_url=http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/liheap

<http://www.illinoisliheap.com/>

Illinois Home Weatherization Assistance Program (IHWAP)

1-800-252-8643

<http://www.weatherizationillinois.com/>

Peoples Energy Corporation

Share the Warmth program

Provides up to \$200 in assistance, per household, to eligible customers

Waukegan Number: 847-336-1880 (Administered through the Salvation Army)

Website: http://www.house.gov/htbin/leave_site?ln_url=http://www.peoplesenergy.com

NICOR Gas Company

NICOR Gas Sharing Program

Waukegan Number: 847 336-1880 (Administered through the Salvation Army)

Website: http://www.house.gov/htbin/leave_site?ln_url=http://www.nicor.com

ComEd (Offers Payment Arrangement if having difficulty paying bills)

Telephone: 1-800-Edison-1 (1-800-334-7661)

Website: http://www.house.gov/htbin/leave_site?ln_url=http://www.exeloncorp.com

Assistance Organizations

Community Action Partnership of Lake County

1200 Glen Flora

Waukegan, IL

847-249-4330

Hours of Operation: 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Website: <http://www.capolc.org/>

Lake County Client Intake Office LIHEAP and Weatherization

106 S. Sheridan Road

Waukegan, Illinois 60085

Telephone: 847-249-4330

Hours of Operation: 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Community and Economic Development Association of Cook County, Inc. (CEDA)

208 South LaSalle Street, Suite 1900 (LIHEAP Suite 2010)

Chicago, Illinois 60604-1001

Telephone: 312-795-8800 (LIHEAP) or 312-795-8998 (Weatherization)

Hours of Operation: 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m.

TIPS ON LOWERING YOUR ENERGY BILLS

FROM

CONGRESSMAN MARK KIRK

- Installing a programmable thermostat can help save you five to fifteen percent on your gas bills

- Most energy companies offer a budget plan to even out your payments over a 12-month period, helping you avoid high gas bills in the winter

- Turning the heat down by just one degree can save you four to five percent on your heating bill

- Request regular furnace tune ups

- Change and clean your furnace filter every three months
- Close fireplace flues when not in use
- Use weather stripping around door frames
- Caulk and seal plumbing pipes, window frames and doors
- Insulate your water heater
- Apply for assistance through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) if your monthly income is under 1,196 for a single person or \$1,604 for couples.

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